



Mentor Allan

BRIEFING PAPER



VOLUNTEERING

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Volunteering: In developing a physical activity project there are a number of strategies which can be employed.

Briefing Paper Introduction

In order to communicate the learning arising from the Mentro Allan project, papers have been written to suit different audiences. Study papers have been prepared specifically for researchers reviewing findings across a number of themes, whereas briefing papers are aimed at local or national project/service managers and policy makers. Each briefing paper covers a different topic although there are many aspects that inter-relate. Finally, practitioner guides are being written for those working in the field, directly delivering projects or activities, and case studies are being prepared to bring to life some of the lessons learnt showing what has been successful, what has been tried, and how some of the challenges have been overcome.

Background to Mentro Allan

Creating an active Wales is central to our One Wales ambition for a healthier future for all. It recognises that sport and physical activity are beneficial to health and that a partnership across the Welsh Assembly Government, Local Authorities, the NHS, the Third Sector and our communities is essential if we are to gain the benefits of an active and healthy Wales¹.

[Only] 30% of adults reported meeting the guidelines for physical activity in the past week².

The Mentro Allan (Venture Out) programme³ is a five year Big Lottery funded project and is actively supported by a diverse network of local and national partners. Its distinctive features are its:

- Aim to motivate a diverse range of sedentary groups to become more active;
- Focus on physical activity in the outdoors environment;
- Use of action research to involve its participants in achieving behaviour change;
- Gathering of evidence of what does and doesn't work in practice.

This paper outlines emerging findings from the research on the role of volunteering in enabling people in different sedentary groups to get involved, change their behaviour and sustain that change.

The evidence on which this briefing paper is based

Over the past four years the Mentro Allan programme has been supporting and monitoring 14 projects across Wales providing practical support to a range of sedentary groups (e.g. the over 50s, young single mothers, people with physical disabilities or with mental health problems, carers, young people, people from Black Minority and Ethnic communities). These projects emerged from an experimental local partnership-forming process described below whose first task was to identify potential participants in selected localities around Wales for whom tailor-made outreach and support projects could be designed and delivered to change their lifestyles.

¹ Minister for Heritage and Minister for Health and Social Services: Creating an Active Wales December 2009

² Welsh Health Survey 2008

³ Part of the Big Lottery's UK-wide Community Sports Initiative, although Mentro Allan focuses on physical activity opportunities as well as sport

The experiences described in this paper have been distilled from the carefully recorded experiences of these projects as they first made contact with their target participants, began to understand their needs, gave them their first taste of physical activity, helped them establish a regular pattern of activity and then supported their transition towards sustainable active lifestyles independent of the projects. Each project has adopted an experimental approach, testing what seems to work through observation and dialogue with participants using action research. This has helped successful practical strategies to be honed through user feedback.

Partnership working has been a fundamental element of all the projects, and of the programme as a whole. Given the pioneering nature of a programme focused on 'hard-to-reach' and 'hard-to-engage' sedentary people, one of the key challenges has been to forge many completely new partnership structures and to make them work practically and strategically. Not surprisingly this has proved to be a dynamic, complex and sometimes turbulent experience, but while a few of the partnerships have struggled at times, most have developed into effective mechanisms for sharing expertise and resources, and many may endure and evolve as Mentro Allan reaches its sustainability phase.

Information for this briefing paper comes specifically from case studies of volunteers which have been provided by the projects (Volunteer Case Studies, VCS, Appendix B), from comments in evaluation seminars, reflective diary entries kept by project coordinators and examples provided in other Mentro Allan case studies and briefing papers.

Introduction

Volunteering is one of the cross cutting themes emerging from the research, being relevant to three of the four key learning outcomes:

- 1 How do people in different sedentary groups change their behaviour to get active and stay active?
- 2 What support do people in different sedentary groups need to get involved, change their behaviour and sustain that change?
- 4 What partnership, management and service delivery arrangements work best to support long term behaviour change?

To see the way in which different approaches to volunteering can be discerned between the projects it is helpful to use the definition and model of Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett⁴. They define volunteering as 'the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain'⁵. The model says that volunteering can be seen as having a formal aspect, where it involves working within an organisation, or informal, where it involves self directed activities which help individuals or the environment. The model then looks at formal volunteering through three different lenses:

- **Volunteering as unpaid work.** In this view, the volunteers can be seen co-delivering services with paid staff and offering the possibility of enabling an activity or service to continue where project funding is no

⁴ Colin Rochester, Angela Ellis Paine, Steven Howlett with Meta Zimmeck (2010) *Volunteering and Society in the 21st Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978 0230 210585

⁵ This definition was adopted by the UK volunteering forum in 1996 and is quoted in Rochester, Ellis Paine and Howlett (2010). This definition refers to immediate "financial gain" rather than longer-term potential for financial gain through improved employment prospects

longer available, or where additional capacity is needed to enable an activity to take place. The motivation of the volunteer is often seen as altruistic.

- **Volunteering as serious leisure.** In this view, volunteering fits into people's social and leisure time, but with a definite goal or role. The volunteer is seen as being motivated by a love for the activity or place or people concerned and the desire to see the activity or club function.
- **Volunteering as social activism.** This view sees volunteering as part of civil society; the way people choose to associate with one another to engage in activities which maintain or promote the strength of society or promote a particular cause or achieve a particular social change. The motivation is often portrayed as a desire to change the current situation or promote a particular belief.

In the final analysis, most volunteering opportunities probably include elements of all three, but the importance of these perspectives is that they lend themselves to particular explanations regarding how to engage, involve, retain and move on volunteers (where volunteering is viewed as unpaid work) or how volunteers emerge, get involved, carry out tasks, develop within a group and leave (where volunteering is viewed as serious leisure or social activism).

In developing a physical activity project there are a number of strategies which can be employed, including:

- Setting up a number of activities for individuals drawn from the general population, which may be open to all or targeted to a specific group of people. Activities can be advertised through networks and in the press or local media. This requires a number of activity leaders, who can be paid or unpaid (ie volunteers), who are recruited from the general population. Walking for Health projects have used this approach, sometimes with referral routes from medical professionals.
- Seeking an interested group of individuals and supporting them to set up a club or organisation which can then recruit or grow its own activity leaders or coaches. This is the way many sports clubs are formed, with support from development workers paid for by local authorities or national sports bodies.

The Mentro Allan approach was different. Coordinators were encouraged to make contact with pre-existing groups who were not already engaged in physical activities, but who were already involved with their target groups. The coordinators then work with these groups to offer taster sessions that gave participants an experience of physical activity outdoors. In most cases participants were not engaging in the activity on their own initiative, and therefore had little experience to enable them to take on voluntary leadership of activities.

Roles of volunteers in the Mentro Allan learning outcomes

Mentro Allan Learning Outcome 1: How do people in different sedentary groups change their behaviour to get active and stay active?

Volunteers can make the following contributions to the way in which sedentary individuals see their need for change, engage or participate in activities which motivate change and then sustain that change:

- Volunteers can emerge from amongst the main opinion formers or decision makers within a pre-existing group when those volunteers are prepared to lead or organise the group's new activities. This was noted in the Swansea project, where carers' support groups were well established, and the leaders needed to be persuaded that Mentro Allan and physical activity fitted with the aims of the group, and could add to

the experience of members. This played upon the role of volunteers as unpaid workers, wishing to serve the group for their general well being. Some projects called these volunteers “gate keepers” (eg Lisa, VCS 15, a young mother in a Mother and Toddlers group in Ynys Mon).

- Once activities are underway, pre-existing volunteers within groups can be important in helping to encourage continued attendance and positive engagement in the activities. In Mentro Allan such volunteers used their influence and position within groups to encourage members to participate, and helped provide the important social element to the activity – engaging participants in conversation. In a number of cases they suggested different venues for activities, or where to meet and would lead the way in co-designing and co-delivering the activities.
- These volunteers can often be the first to see how a pre-existing group can expand its range of activities. This can help them promote the group’s new activities to past members or as a way of recruiting new members. This leads to the ‘win win’ situation of groups growing through the inclusion of physical activity into the programme.
- These volunteers may be more committed to the Mentro Allan activities than other members of the group where they see the benefits to the group as a whole or where they wish to see the Mentro Allan activities existing under the banner of their group. For some activity groups that formed, Mentro Allan activities took on a separate identity, often with a core of members from one pre-existent group. In these cases, the leaders of the pre-existent group may not have been as personally committed to the aims of Mentro Allan.
- Whilst volunteers can clearly be a positive influence, they can also be a barrier to change, as witnessed by some Mentro Allan project coordinators who reported resistance in persuading some groups to take up new opportunities. It can be harder to change a volunteer’s mind than an employee’s mind because they have different motivations. An employee may be more open to physical activity opportunities if they assist them in meeting one of their external or organisational goals whether or not they are convinced about the value of physical activity *per se*. However, volunteers, motivated for a variety of different reasons, are not answerable to an external body and therefore persuasion and a conviction that physical activity is of value to the group is often needed to make headway.
- Volunteers may encourage greater attendance at activities, invite their friends or suggest contacts for the project worker to follow up:

“The group volunteered to ensure marketing, and speaking to the community was a priority to them.” (Project coordinator reflective diary)

This is often a successful approach because the volunteer is a member of the peer group being targeted. This role can be expanded or formalised by appointing a champion, who is trained to attend meetings of potential participants to promote the project or is based within an institutional situation (school, residential block or workplace) where they can be ‘responsible’ for promoting the activities amongst their peers. In one project a champion was used to promote Mentro Allan amongst adults with learning disabilities who attended certain day services (Sarah, VCS 2).

Mentro Allan Learning Outcome 2: What support do people in different sedentary groups need to get involved, change their behaviour and sustain that change?

Three 'stages of engagement' have been used to frame the findings about engaging and retaining participants: *initial engagement* (finding participants, and getting them to their first activity session); *retention and development* (of participants and their groups where appropriate) and *sustained involvement* (activities and participation continuing independently from project support). During these stages volunteers provide support in a number of different ways:

- **By supporting and promoting the cultural/behavioural norms for a group on an activity:** In this case the activity leader initially creates the atmosphere and sets norms for the group on an activity. In smaller groups whose members are compliant, this works well. In some groups, however, additional support to encourage adoption of the norms is needed from people who are seen as 'part of the group' for this to be an effective way of supporting participant retention and development. In many activities this role has been filled by an enthusiastic participant (eg Bhunesh VSC 5), but in some contexts it has been found helpful to ask an influential participant to come along to a new activity. This is sometimes the first step in seeing if a participant is ready to progress to becoming a volunteer.
- **By providing emotional support and encouragement:** Projects have found that some paid activity leaders are able to lead an activity, but are less able to provide the social or emotional support required or to promote changed cultural/behaviour norms. At times this support has been provided by the project staff accompanying the participants on an activity, but this is not always possible, particularly as the number of activities grows. Having volunteers, who may or may not have the skills or training to lead the activity, but who do have the skills to relate to participants and encourage them to participate actively, can lead to a richer experience for the participants. With a pre-existent group, this role may be provided by existing leaders, but in new groups, it could be provided by a specific volunteer. This is a key part of the participatory nature of the Mentro Allan method, where participants have valued the social elements of the activities.
- **By providing physical support, coaching or leadership:** For instance, the Pedal Power cycling activities in Cardiff and Wrexham used volunteers to provide additional support to disabled people. These volunteers encouraged participants to try something new, gave positive reinforcement of success and provided physical help (for example, leading visually impaired participants) to overcome obstacles to participation. Where groups engage in activities like walking, there is often a 'fast' and a 'slow' group, and there can be a need to split the leadership/support between a number of people to ensure that all participants have a positive experience. This was provided by volunteers in specific volunteering programmes in the Cardiff project. In others situations, carers (family members or support workers, paid or unpaid) provided this support.
- **By supporting the participative action research approach adopted by Mentro Allan.** Having additional, identified people on an activity who are helping to collect informal information about participants reactions, preferences and difficulties or issues can be a real help in enabling an activity organiser to respond to the needs / desires / preferences of participants. This in turn helps the retention of participants. Particular examples are volunteer leaders of the community gardening project in Dyfi Valley, where they were involved in keeping reflective diaries in the same way as staff, and team meeting or supervision sessions held with volunteers in the Cardiff disabilities project.

- **By using volunteer activity leaders:** In some cases volunteers have been used who are seeking experience in leading activities to improve their skills or as a stepping stone to employment. They receive training by project staff or through externally provided training before becoming volunteer activity leaders. The Cardiff project working with disabled people used this approach in a number of cases. The lead organisation is often used to involving such volunteers in other areas of its activity, and can have a well developed recruitment and supervision processes.
- **By providing continuity:** Where a group is involved in organising a number of taster activities, the activity provider can be different for each session. Also, as projects grow, a coordinator may be unable to attend all the activities. In this context some form of continuity is beneficial, and in some Mentro Allan projects this has been provided by volunteers attending activities as a 'second leader' or to 'take the register'.
- **By becoming an activity group leader:** In a number of projects participants became 'helpers' and progressed to being activity leaders following a period of shadowing or coaching often combined with explicit training as a walking, Nordic walking or cycling leader. For new groups formed through Mentro Allan, this was seen as a crucial step towards sustainability. Once a group became volunteer led, the support demands on the project coordinator were reduced and the group could begin its transition to independence, usually through the setting up of a club. For groups which existed before Mentro Allan, this also signalled a transition to a background or advisory role for the project coordinator.

The route by which a participant moves from being an active member of a group to becoming an activity leader is usually facilitated by the coordinator, who will need to be in good contact with the group and the existing activity leader in order to enable this. This is one difference between using 'in house' activity leaders and 'brought in' activity leaders, as volunteer development needs participant observation, supervision of volunteers as they take on new roles and support should things go wrong.

Mentro Allan Learning Outcome 4: What partnership, management and service delivery arrangements work best to support long term behaviour change?

Volunteers can be seen as a critical element in the sustainability of activities. In this, it should be recognised that a range of volunteering roles exist, from leading activities, to collecting payments and membership fees, coordinating volunteers, fundraising, committee membership, chair and treasurer roles and developing social enterprises and business models for activity delivery. In the last year, most projects looked at how they could sustain activities without Mentro Allan support, and there are some examples of proactive planning, for example making links to an existing local volunteer-led activity-based group. Exit routes that have included an element of volunteering are listed below:

- Participants leaving Mentro Allan before the end of the project to join local pre-existing volunteer-led activity or sports clubs which enable them to continue and develop their physical activity. This included young participants in Pembroke Dock who have joined the pre-existing volunteer-led local sailing club, a rock climbing club and a canoe/kayaking club. Without volunteers, these pre-existing groups would not exist, and therefore they would not provide an exit strategy for participants.

- Participants continuing to run groups set up as a part of Mentro Allan include buggy walking in the Dyfi Valley and Anglesey, a walking group in Newport and an after school drop off walking group in Rhondda Cynon Taff. These have tended to be informal groups, but are organised by recognised leaders.
- Where physical activity has been integrated into the activity programme of a pre-existing group, such as an independent youth club in Pembroke Dock which used the confidence and skills gained by involvement in Mentro Allan to maintain outdoor activities. A mental health support group in Torfaen also integrated outdoor activities into its programme. These have used both paid and voluntary workers. Carer support groups run by volunteers in Swansea have also integrated physical activity into their regular meetings.
- Where new community groups have been set up to manage assets and activities established by Mentro Allan, which includes two projects which created a community garden (Dyfi Valley) and a community allotment (Tarragan Allotment, Greater Bargoed). Both of these have been established as constituted groups with a management committee and links with local schools, youth groups and, mental health service user groups and provide an asset available for continued physical activity in the outdoors.
- Where new partnership based groups have been set up with participant involvement, including the Swansea carers' project which has been superseded by a constituted action group made up of Mentro Allan participants with the support of the local authority and the Swansea Carers Centre. This has a fundraising strategy and aims to maintain the activities previously funded by Mentro Allan.
- Where interest based groups have been set up to maintain the interest of participants, such as the Neath Port Talbot project which established a nature conservation group around a nature reserve close to the young participants' homes. This group will enable the link with the outdoors and physical activity in the outdoors to be continued.
- Where a new sports or activity club has been set up, for example the new women's kayaking club in Holyhead created following the successful completion of proficiency qualifications by young participants supported by the Anglesey project. A Nordic walking group has also been set up by the Bridgend project to continue the activities, and a multi activity group has also been set up in Caerphilly.
- Where a social enterprise has been set up to maintain equipment and provide a sustainable way of enabling an activity to continue, such as the bicycles purchased by the Newport project which were given to a new social enterprise created to maintain the bikes, and act as a base for cycling activities for local participants.

Looking across all these projects, three behaviours can be identified where volunteers are enabling sustainable behaviour change:

- where pre-existing volunteers in a group take action to continue the core service provision.
- where participants have been introduced to pre-existing volunteer led groups during the lifetime of the project.
- where participants involved in an activity or set of activities develop the group themselves, with the benefit of training and support, so that it becomes participant led and independent.

These three behaviours can be understood as responding to the situation experienced by a target group, such as the lack of available local provision of physical activity, and reflect the group based practice of Mentro Allan.

Where participants are engaged through pre-existing groups, behaviour change is often more sustainable, and enables participants to stay within their comfort zone socially by seeking to alter the activities of the group rather than challenging their loyalty to the group. Where participants are not from an existing group and there is a need to build a new group, the variety of approaches used by Mentro Allan to engage people with the outdoors and physical activity showed that there is not a 'one size fits all' solution to enabling the group to become sustainable and independent. A number of different solutions have been used, depending on the activity, the participants themselves and the local availability of existing clubs or organisations. Finally, where individuals took up an interest through Mentro Allan, and 'out grew' the provision provided by Mentro Allan, progression routes to local clubs, where they exist, have been used. Finally, there are examples of participants who leave Mentro Allan and continue their participation in physical activity on their own, with friends or family, using private or public activity provision. The nature of the participants targeted and the Mentro Allan focus on engagement through groups (rather than as individuals) may explain the apparent rarity of such individual examples. However, this individual exit information was not recorded systematically so its comparative importance as a sustainable behaviour change is unknown.

Issues in involving volunteers in Mentro Allan

There are three types of volunteer who have been involved with Mentro Allan:

1. Volunteers already associated with pre-existing groups
2. Volunteers who have joined Mentro Allan to provide additional capacity to deliver activities or provide additional support. These have generally been from outside the target group
3. Participants who have become volunteers

These three groups have different starting points and development needs to be effective in assisting the goal of sustained behaviour change in participants. These are discussed and illustrated below.

1. Volunteers already associated with pre-existing groups often have extensive and insider knowledge of the target group, and so do not require induction into its culture or their peers' expectations and likes/dislikes. However they may be conditioned to think within certain boundaries which may need to be challenged by the project worker. This has included attitudes to the outdoors, particular places or venues, physical activity and particular activities. This has been seen with support workers (paid and unpaid), carers for participants and leaders and volunteers of community groups, support groups and youth groups. Comments in other Mentro Allan briefing papers about the role of gatekeepers can be applied to this group of volunteers.

Support and training has generally been informal with these volunteers, with coordinators seeking to influence rather than dictate what volunteers must do.

2. Volunteers from outside the target group have been used to support some activities, especially where Mentro Allan lead organisations already involve volunteers in their work before Mentro Allan and extending their roles was natural:

- In the Cardiff and Vale project working with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, MEWN (Minority Ethnic Women's Network, a voluntary organisation) was the lead organisation and involved their pre-existing BME volunteers from the early stages in planning the launch event and promoting the project and activities to other groups. Some of these volunteers were outside the target group as they were already physically active. One volunteer preferred the back room tasks and undertook the collection and

entering of monitoring information. Another was involved in supporting activities, encouraging friends and contacts to attend and befriend participants. MEWN is run by the ethnic groups that form their target audience, so the volunteers were not used to bridging any ethnic or cultural gap between workers and participants explicitly, rather they broadened the ethnic groups involved in delivery of the project. These volunteers were similar to paid staff in their development needs, requiring support to learn the monitoring system and the participative action research methodology of the project. Like paid staff they also received supervision, both formal and informal.

- Other projects used volunteers from outside the target group to increase delivery capacity. Innovate Trust, the lead organisation for the Cardiff Disabilities project, has volunteers and also regular volunteer placements as part of its wider aim of enabling people to gain employment skills. One such volunteer, Colin (VCS 3), an ex-Army officer and teacher, provided additional leadership capacity within the project, receiving training in water sports to enable him to assist in this area. Younger people have also become involved. Ray (VCS 4), a student on placement with Cardiff City Council, began to volunteer for Mentro Allan and continued during his final year. He now works for Innovate Trust and is a volunteer walk leader. The Dyfi Valley project, led by the voluntary organisation Eco Dyfi, involved a volunteer in processing the monitoring and registration forms, an opportunity that was tailor made for them. This illustrates that there is often a degree of role design to fit round the skills, motivation and availability of the volunteer.
- There can be issues around the culture gap between these volunteers and the participants. This has been overcome in a number of ways: all volunteers in the Cardiff disabilities project undertake an induction which includes disability awareness training; other projects have undertaken Mental Health First Aid courses; new volunteers are accompanied for the first few sessions they are involved in, projects involving young people (eg Neath Port Talbot) have supported volunteers in developing youth work skills.

For other lead organisations, their experience of using volunteers developed through the Mentro Allan project.

- The Merthyr – Blaenau Gwent project, led by two local authorities also used volunteers, but in a defined role to support participants in a gardening project, based in the grounds of a long stay mental health hospital. The Swansea Carer's Project, also local authority led, involved volunteers who enabled sustainable capacity for activities to be developed during the project (Barbara and David, VCS 10 and 11).

The use of volunteers for providing support for participants does not seem to be related just to different target groups: the culture and procedures of the lead organisation and the local context were also important. For example, the Pembroke Dock and Neath Port Talbot projects both worked with young people, one project led by Pembrokeshire National Park and the other by the local authority and Groundwork Trust. In the latter project there was a greater involvement of volunteers in leading activities and setting up independent groups. The involvement was also dependent on the activities that were being undertaken. Less adventurous activities, where insurance demands were easier to comply with, were more likely to be led by volunteers (with training).

Recruiting, inducting and retaining volunteers for project-specific roles throw up a number of issues. Volunteers have been recruited from a number of sources including workers from other projects run by lead organisations, the coordinator's own social and work networks, via community events, through 'back to work' schemes run by Jobcentre Plus or other support organisations, through volunteering fairs at universities or by registering volunteering opportunities with the local volunteering centre. Volunteers from all these routes have different expectations which can affect the way they need to be managed and given roles. In general, volunteers who aim to gain new skills come in smaller numbers, can be asked to undertake training and act more like employees.

The Cardiff Disabilities project found student volunteers were different from other volunteers. The project saw a drop off in interest from volunteers recruited from a student volunteering fair because of a significant gap between the fair and when the activities started, because a few volunteers would be spread across a number of activities (reflective diary entries commented that student volunteers tend to go in a crowd) and because of the difficulties in aligning the demands of the project with their availability (due to exams, long summer breaks, etc).

Managing volunteers can also present barriers to projects. Volunteers who simply want to do voluntary work (rather than volunteers with a prior commitment to a pre-existing group or recruited for a specific activity) can be selective in their choice of which activities to support. Reflective diary entries indicated this was problematic when trying to organise the range of activities that appealed to participants, for instance in one project canoeing and cycling was more popular than gardening. Another barrier is that volunteers can be unreliable in their attendance at activities. This latter issue is complicated further if arrangements have to be flexible because of the weather or other unforeseen circumstances. This highlights the management problem if plans for activities assume volunteers will help without pre-checking the willingness and availability of the volunteers.

Volunteers often have varying levels of health, fitness and confidence. In Mentro Allan additional support was often given over a number of years to enable volunteers to overcome difficulties in their lives. This was generally due to the volunteers being part of an employment assistance scheme, but not universally so (eg Barbara, VCS 10 or Ida, VCS 11). In fact, Ida began volunteering with a support worker because of mental health difficulties, but was able to help without support after a number of months.

Some Mentro Allan projects had specific issues in supporting participants which required specialist training, for example mental health first aid courses for volunteers involved in supporting a service users support group to undertake physical activities (Dyfi Valley) and diversity and equality training (Cardiff Disabilities project).

In all these activities, project coordinators also had training needs, and a number attended specific training in managing volunteers, setting up a volunteering scheme and developing information and induction packs.

3. Participants who are helped to become volunteers have been a major focus of Mentro Allan, as they can act as models of the behaviour change which is desired in the wider group. Participants make the transition for a number of reasons. In some cases they enjoy the activities and want to see more people benefit from them, or perhaps they want to do the activity more often themselves. This motivates them to take on the role of an assistant leader or leader, undertaking training as necessary to enable them to lead (eg Haulwen, VCS 12). Other participants see volunteering as a way of using the activity for self development, and this can reinforce the behaviour change through continued participation and increased commitment to the activity. This was seen in the Cardiff Disabilities project, where a team member reflected:

“One of our more able service users with mild learning difficulties has recently undergone volunteer training and now volunteers at the sessions she used to attend. Her communication has been excellent. It was suggested that she become a volunteer because she was arriving very early to sessions and trying to help the activity providers set up. This was not appropriate for insurance reasons so we asked her if she would like to become a volunteer. She seemed to be very pleased and proud to be asked.”

Most projects have tried to ensure the groups they have supported are assisted to become self sustaining and independent from Mentro Allan. This has taken the form of helping them constitute themselves into a club that

can obtain insurance and develop structures to enable activities to be conducted safely in future. This has proved successful in some cases, e.g. the mixed activity club in Caerphilly (see the case study), but not in others (e.g. a walking group in the Dyfi Valley project, VCS 7)

In other cases, seeing the end of Mentro Allan funding has prompted participants to consider how to continue activities. In this scenario people have come together to form clubs or organisations in order to raise funds to pay for the activities, as in Swansea (see the case study and VCS's 8-13). The new organisation formed has a mixture of volunteer led activities and paid instructor led activities.

Finally, in two projects (Greater Bargoed and Dyfi Valley) where a community garden or allotment has been set up, local residents, local community development groups, the local authority and other stakeholders have put together funding applications, formed a committee and taken on management of the project, which has become a community hub of activity, with numerous local groups using the garden or allotment (see the case study on the Taraggan Project).

For participants who become volunteers there is a need for training and supervision to enable them to safely gain skills and confidence. An example is Suhena (VCS 6), who was already a member of a local community group, became interested in Mentro Allan and used a placement opportunity in a university course to volunteer. She has the potential for helping to maintain the walking group she helped to lead. Also in Newport, another volunteer (Bhunesh, VCS 5) helped to lead walks and has also applied for funding for the fitness group to continue outdoor activities. She was receiving support from the Mentro Allan coordinators, but they felt that if the support was withdrawn that she may not be able to sustain the momentum gathered with Mentro Allan.

Where the target group has particular issues, additional support has been given over a number of years to enable volunteers to overcome difficulties in their lives. For many, the experience of overcoming hurdles regarding physical activity leads to an increase in confidence which makes the taking on volunteering roles possible.

The benefits and legacy of involving volunteers in Mentro Allan

The projects all saw the use of volunteers as one way to make their activities sustainable. This is distinct from sustainable change in behaviour of the participants, but given the long term nature of the support which is needed for behaviour change, it is seen as a necessary stepping stone to the final goal. Other benefits of using volunteers detailed above are:

- Providing additional capacity for activities and back room support.
- Engaging with a wider circle of people within the target group.
- Enabling the participants' voices to be heard as part of the participative methods used.
- Providing continuity and social support which provide the basis for retention of new participants in activities.

There are also benefits which relate specifically to the volunteers:

- Gaining skills and new experiences which can assist people to find or change their career direction, overcome personal issues and be part of the route into employment. These are seen in all the volunteer case studies in appendix B.

- Volunteering can provide therapeutic activity. This is seen in examples such as Barbara (VCS 10) or Ida (VCS 11). In some cases this has involved formal support from an agency, but in others it has helped recovery from bereavement.
- Helping to reinforce the behaviour change brought about by participating in Mentro Allan activities. For many participants who became volunteers, they do not see themselves as volunteers, but simply as part of the Mentro Allan project or the group which has been formed.
- Providing opportunities for recruitment of participants or members to other activities or organisations which they belong. This has been particularly true of the community garden and allotment projects, where the cross fertilisation of working in partnership with other community groups has provided mutual encouragement and confidence.

The changes achieved in volunteers' lives also have a wider impact. Volunteers who gained skills through Mentro Allan have gone on to provide leadership and support in other organisations which may share some common interests with Mentro Allan, but have been attracting a different target group or the general public. An example is Barbara (VCS 10), who has moved on from Mentro Allan to be active in three other organisations which promote physical activities in the open air.

Further information

The MA website contains information about the National Partnership and all local projects as well as annual reports, research papers, practitioner guides, case studies and guidance notes issued to project staff. www.mentroallan.co.uk

Appendix A – Projects and target groups

Each project is hosted in a lead organisation and employs a project co-ordinator, the 14 projects are:

- Anglesey County Council – **Young Women aged 16 to 30**
- Flintshire and Wrexham Groundwork Trust – **People With Disabilities**
- Eco Dyfi (Dyfi Valley) – **Rural Isolation**
- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (Pembroke Dock) – **Young People aged 11 to 25**
- City and County of Swansea – **Carers**
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council – **Youth at Risk of Disengagement**
- Groundwork Caerphilly (Caerphilly and Torfaen) – **Disadvantaged Individuals and Groups**
- Gwent Association of Volunteer Associations (Greater Bargoed) – **People on Low Incomes**
- Sustrans (Rhondda Cynon Taff) – **People on Low Incomes**
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council – **People with Mental Health Problems**
- Newport SEWREC – **People from BME communities**
- MEWN Cymru (Cardiff and Vale) – **People from BME communities**
- Innovate Trust (Cardiff) – **People with Disabilities**
- Bridgend County Borough Council – **Older People in Garw and Ogmore Valleys**

Appendix B – Volunteer Case Studies

These case studies are of individual volunteers from a number of the Mentro Allan projects. They are illustrative of the range of experiences which volunteers have brought to Mentro Allan and of the benefit that Mentro Allan and volunteering has had on them. Permission to publish these details has been given by the volunteers concerned. Names have been changed.

1: Barry, Cardiff Disabilities Project

This case study is about Barry, a young man who had been unemployed for over twelve months. He was referred to Venture Out Cardiff through the local Volunteer Centre by Jobcentre Plus. Due to his circumstances he lacked confidence and was quite depressed. It took over two months from initial referral to actually beginning to volunteer, but he joined the Millennium Volunteer scheme and things took off. He undertook some activity specific training during the sessions and was given Person Centred planning training through Innovate Trust.

Barry has volunteered for about seven months for between two to four sessions a week. He regularly attends the Nordic walking session, horse riding, sailing and the walking group. He said:

“I enjoy all these activities because they are all new to me”.

He made a difference to the activities as he particularly enjoyed leading the horses at the riding session which is an essential part of the activity. He is well known and trusted by the participants and as he is a familiar face, participants felt comfortable approaching him and talking to him. Because he was such a reliable volunteer, Venture Out Cardiff was able to invite more people to participate in the activities. Barry said:

“I enjoy meeting people and I have a better understanding of people with disabilities”.

Barry was quiet and shy of meeting new people, but now he is more confident. The future looks optimistic for Barry. After gaining experience and increasing his confidence levels, he was able to successfully apply for a paid support worker role with Innovate Trust. Barry confirms that volunteering has benefited him:

“I am more confident than before and I’ve got a job part time with Innovate Trust and the courses with Venture Out have helped me to get the job”.

Barry has completed over 200 hours of volunteering and has earned a certificate signed by The First Minister. He would like to progress into full time work and would like to share his skills with other groups in the area. Barry said:

“Venture Out has given me new experiences which has changed the direction of my life”.

2: Sarah, Cardiff Disabilities Project

Sarah has been involved with Venture Out of four years. She was initially nominated as a ‘champion’ by Cardiff People First (a learning disability advocacy group). Sarah is a member of Wales Special Olympics Team and she has learning difficulties.

Sarah became a volunteer after she began assisting on group cycle rides and then joined the walking group. She has had training which has made her more confident and was happy to lead small groups of walkers who have mobility issues. She enjoys helping out when Venture Out staff aren’t available and said:

“I am very happy and glad that I’m able to help out. I’m also happy to volunteer on the Nordic Walking sessions when needed and I like to have the responsibility and deciding on what route to take when leading the walk”

She ensures that members of the group are not left behind. This makes them feel as though they are a part of the group which keeps them motivated and wanting to attend. She has also promoted the activities to her peers. She already had friendships with many of the new participants so is able to make them feel more relaxed and included when they joined the sessions. She is happy to be given some responsibility and is a familiar and friendly face. She said:

“Volunteering has made me happy as I have never had that responsibility before”

Sarah is a great asset to Venture Out Cardiff, and although very busy with other activities she intends to continue as a volunteer. She said:

“I want to keep volunteering with Venture Out in the future and I will be doing more training and more volunteering with Pedal Power”

Sarah had been nervous to go to public places, and she has now overcome this:

“I can get quite nervous going out in public as I have had problems with gangs of boys in the past. Volunteering has made me feel better but I am still nervous going out at night. I feel scared when I see gangs of boys but I feel ok when I’m with the Venture Out group because I like to meet new carers and socialize with people in the group”.

3: Colin, Cardiff Disabilities Project

Colin is a former army officer and a secondary school teacher; he also has Asperser's Syndrome and a hearing impairment. Colin joined Venture Out Cardiff when he was referred by Quest Employment Agency linked to a scheme run by Job Centre Plus. At the beginning he was allowed to shadow project staff and then he was given more responsibility. Colin had training in the introduction to water sports and took activity specific training during sessions.

As a volunteer Colin helped to run various activities, especially the walking group, climbing, sailing, horse riding and Nordic walking. He led sessions when Venture Out staff were unavailable and still does this occasionally. Colin has been involved as a volunteer since April 2009 for between three to four sessions a week. He is a “hands on” volunteer who can always be relied upon to attend activities. He works well with the participants and was happy to be given responsibility. Colin says:

“I enjoy working with the Venture Out staff and feeling like a member of the team. I love participating in outdoor activities and have enjoyed supporting people with learning disabilities”.

Colin is a very capable volunteer and is now doing paid work, after following up contacts suggested by Venture Out staff and other people he met through the activities. Colin thinks that volunteering has benefited him as it:

“It has given me an insight in to the needs of vulnerable people and has opened up opportunities for me to work with these groups. Because of the experience I gained through volunteering, I am now a neighbourhood working tutor with DART ⁶”

In the future, Colin hopes to move on to support work.

When Colin started to volunteer he had to overcome some fears in order to volunteer:

“Yes – After a period of time being un-employed I lost confidence in being in a work place and I also suffered with stress. I was fearful when I started volunteering as I didn’t know how I was going to be perceived. Volunteering gave me back my confidence”.

4: Ray, Cardiff Disabilities Project

Ray is a final year planning student. He joined Venture Out Cardiff after meeting their staff while working for Cardiff Council during his ‘placement year’. Ray liked the project and offered to help out after he left the Council to go back to University for his final year. He began to volunteer by shadowing project staff as he was eager to learn and gain experience. Gradually he took more responsibility and then took activity specific training.

Before Ray joined Venture Out he wasn’t sure what to expect:

“although I had volunteered with able people before, I didn’t know what to expect with people with restricted physical abilities”.

What Ray enjoyed most about Venture Out is that :

“It’s fun – I’ve enjoyed getting to know the clients, it’s not like volunteering but going to meet up with friends. Venture Out has a welcoming atmosphere and it has a community feeling that’s nice. Venture Out is good at catering activities to suit all abilities”.

Ray assisted regularly for a year at the Nordic walking and walking sessions. He has also volunteered in the office working on the website. He volunteered twice a week until August 2010, and then after graduating less frequently as Ray successfully applied for a paid support worker role with Innovate Trust. He is an enthusiastic volunteer and happy to take responsibility when project staff are unable to attend. He is well known and trusted by the participants. Having a familiar face at activities helps participants feel relaxed and comfortable and encourages them to keep attending.

Having Ray as a volunteer has enabled Venture Out Cardiff to split the walking group in two and adapt each group to the physical abilities of the participants (fast and a slow walking group). Ray is approachable and gets on well with all the participants. Ray said why he liked the walking groups:

“Nordic walking is well suited for everyone. There are two different walking groups depending on the abilities of the groups.

Ray enrolled on the Millennium Volunteers scheme and has completed over 100 hours of volunteering. Ray enjoyed volunteering because:

⁶ DART stands for Disability Advice and Resource Team. Its part of Cardiff Council's lifelong learning department, that works with disabled people

“I have been volunteering as an activity assistant – talking to the clients and leading the horses on the rides. It’s rewarding to know that you’re benefiting clients who gain confidence from doing the activities and I’ve made new friends that I wouldn’t have met with otherwise. Venture Out has opened up new experiences for me and I’ve been able to realize new things to try.”

He has gained much experience from volunteering, that has enabled him to get full time employment as a support worker and he still attends as a volunteer when he is able to. Ray said:

“I now have a job with Innovate Trust and I’d like to do support work or teaching and I’m willing to do training to do these. I really hope that Venture Out can continue, because the activities need leaders although we can meet up to go for a walk as a group, we won’t have a leader which is essential to risk access the route and Venture Out staff is supportive”.

5: Bhunesh, Newport Ethnic Minorities Project.

Bhunesh volunteers with Mentro Allan in Newport. She was already involved with a community fitness group for black, minority ethnic older people called the ‘Mosaic project’. She started off as a participant on walking activities and other adventure sports. After attending regular activities she was proactive in helping recruit participants and was keen to attend relevant training to support the activities. She attended a volunteer walk leader training course with Lets Walk Cymru. This has developed her confidence and ability and she is now a competent walk leader.

“I enjoy doing outdoor activities that improves my health while socially getting to know new people”

She volunteered regularly taking the group on longer walks. These helped her to get to know the group members better and it also helped the group to gel. Through volunteering she is now more aware of people’s difficulties, and has learnt new skills.

“I’m confident in map reading; how to do a risk assessment when walking at different times of the year; how to understand people’s health and safety issues and how to plan the route on public transport to and from a walk destination.”

Being a volunteer has helped her to get to know her local environment and she has discovered interesting places to walk. She has also then trained to ride a bike through the project, and is now able to go on trips with the groups into the Brecon Beacons National Park. She is very active in recruiting participants to activities and in promoting new sessions to keep the group fresh and interested.

“I love to be able to help older people combat their isolation and to be part of developing young people’s interest and awareness of their environment”.

Bhunesh has helped to overcome difficulties with the fitness group leaders as a volunteer. Initially she introduced the group to the Mentro Allan coordinators. Because the community leaders needed time to build the trust and rapport with the coordinators, the group was depended on Bhunesh being with them on every occasion. However because of personal commitments she couldn’t always attend the walks and this meant it is now easier as other women have done the training and there are four or five walk leaders.

Mentro Allan has provided some incentives and equipment for her to stay involved as a volunteer. She has applied for funding on behalf of the fitness group to continue some physical activities and hopes that the groups can carry on.

6: Suhena, Newport Ethnic Minorities Project

Suhena volunteers with *Mentro Allan* in Newport. She attends walks as a support walk leader, encouraging participants and promoting new activities. She first heard about *Mentro Allan* at a local community group which she belongs to. She joined a walking group and came on a number of walks, enjoying them.

“I have developed a keen interest in walking and have become much fitter and adventurous since being involved. I’m climbing Snowdon for charity this year which I never would’ve thought about in the past”

As part of a placement with her university course, Suhena started to volunteer with *Mentro Allan*. She had an initial meeting which helped her to see what opportunities existed and how she would be supported. She undertook walk leader training to get her started and received informal mentoring from the walk leader. Suhena feels that:

“volunteering has helped to build my confidence in a number of ways; I feel confident leading walks, networking with professionals and community members. I think it has given me the confidence and experience to work in the field of community development, particularly with minority ethnic communities. The biggest challenge I face now is developing a career alongside being a volunteer and managing time spent giving something back”

In the future, Suhena would like to develop a full time career in community work as well as helping people to experience exciting activities that she has been fortunate to experience herself. The project coordinator has seen Suhena grow in confidence and feels that Suhena could lead walks on her own in the future, adding to the long term sustainability of a walking group in Newport once the *Mentro Allan* project has closed.

7: Rob, Dyfi Valley Rural Isolation Project

Rob volunteers with the *Mentro Allan* walking group. This group grew from the Walkways to health group and Rob was involved in the group before *Mentro Allan* began to work with the group. Rob moved to Powys from the Midlands. Since moving he has found that community activities are embraced by everyone, which is not so in the urban areas he came from.

The walking group is a good environment for social interaction. Rob most enjoys the company and the friendships he has made. Rob said about his friends:

“When making friends with young people in the group it makes me mentally active and makes me feel young and gives you a purpose for living.”

Rob has always been active going cycling and likes to go out in the country, the rain doesn’t put him off but traffic is a safety factor that inhibits this activity. Rob has been a volunteer walk leader for six or seven years, but through *Mentro Allan* he gained a certificate as a walk leader at a weekend course. When Rob first started walking there was no problem, but he now suffers from angina. He was advised not to go up steep hills or to go out when it’s windy or cold because it would restrict his breathing. The coordinator says that volunteering had benefited his overall health:

“The walking has been a help with cardiac rehabilitation following a heart attack last year. Because he is healthier he has been able to recover from treatment quicker”.

When Mentro Allan finishes Rob feels it will be sad for the community:

“The walks have finished after the end of the month as there is no insurance to cover the walkers. I have had great pleasure of going walking and meeting different people. I will miss walking with company, although I will continue to go walking on my own to see the beautiful scenery and to be out in the fresh air”.

8: Alan, Swansea Carers Project

Alan attended Mentro Allan Swansea and was an enthusiastic participant and volunteer at many activities. He currently cares for his mother and is proud to take on this role as it is now valued by society. Mentro Allan has opened up many opportunities that he would not have thought of considered possible. His proudest moments are when he:

“Completing the 3 mile Sports Relief run and reaching the end of Worm’s Head on a very blustery day (never ventured there before) but also managing to take JJ across some demanding terrain to the main island”.

He has also discovered new possibilities and opportunities that are offered by the outdoor world:

“I am now interested in outdoor orienteering using navigation aids such as Ordnance Survey maps, a compass and GPS”

With Mentro Allan he has met many interesting people when visiting many organisations and events that would not otherwise have been possible.

“I almost certainly wouldn’t have done any of the walks / activities/ visits without my involvement with MA and the encouragement and support received from all staff involved”.

Through his involvement as a participant, Alan has become involved in the MA operational group which aims to *“continue the good work and keep activities going”.*

9: Ann, Swansea Carers Project-

Ann is a carer looking after her husband and suffers from ME herself. She first got to know about Mentro Allan Swansea at an introductory session

“The Mentro Allan coordinator suggested that maybe some of us would like to join him and his team in an activity one day. Several of us did and ‘WOW’ did this change my life for the better. Every day of the week there was something different for me to participate in, and on most of those days there were different people to enjoy things with, laugh with, talk with, share problems with and all the while getting fitter and feeling so much better”.

In spite of her difficulties, Ann enjoyed taking part in all the activities that Mentro Allan offered. She enjoyed being outdoors and meeting people at the sessions. This has helped her to cope with depression and isolation.

She has taken part in walking and Nordic walking activities, 10k and 5k runs for cancer and a Santa dash at a Xmas event. She now takes part in the weekly pilates sessions and has done dance and chair based exercise classes. Ann has been on bus trips for away day walks, visited museums, art galleries and the Egyptian Centre and has learnt how to run an allotment and now grows her own vegetables. Ann has also taken part in summer parties in the parks and winter social evenings...

“so many adventures too many to mention”.

Supported by Mentro Allan, Ann has completed a walking leaders course, a first aid course and has been on several hanging basket workshops.

As a volunteer Ann is Treasurer of the Mentro Allan Operational Group.

“Being out in the fresh air, being more active makes you feel more positive. I still live in a very negative world at home but knowing I have ME, my time with Mentro Allan friends any day of the week has been refreshing, uplifting and changed my life for the better”.

10: Barbara, Swansea Carers Project

Barbara has been with Mentro Allan Swansea since September 2008 and is an active volunteer. She discovered Mentro Allan at a Walking Forum held in the Duvant Rugby Club:

“At the time my doctor had signed me off work due to stress. I was searching for a way back into a healthy life – stress free and sociable”.

“Mentro Allan set me on the path to recovery and I will forever be grateful to them for that. Whilst engaged with Mentro Allan, it was a revelation and a saving grace. Mentro Allan has given me confidence to be involved in other volunteering roles”

Barbara has participated in many activities such as Tai Chi, Pilates, Nordic Walking, Walking and Cycling. She has taken several courses to help her be an effective volunteer, including First Aid, Walk Leader, Risk Assessing a walk and Sustainable Fundraising Course. The courses enabled her to lead walks during an activities day in July and she has subsequently led a walk in the Clyne Valley. Barbara also enjoys the social aspect of Mentro Allan and attended a social evening at Sketty Park.

Barbara has used her volunteering experiences and is now able to support other groups in her area, so her future looks to be very active.

“I have retired from work now and am involved with the Mumbles Development Trust (having been trained as a walk leader for their ‘Mumbles Way’) and the Mumbles Tourist Association where I now coordinate the annual Gower Walking Festival. I also am a committee member for The Clyne Valley Community Project. All this is voluntary work”.

11: David, Swansea Carers Project

David joined Mentro Allan Swansea in 2009 when he found himself out of work. He had decided that he wanted to get out of the construction industry and into fitness and outdoor activities.

“But at 41 years of age and no qualifications in the subject I knew it was going to be a struggle”.

Mentor Allan was instrumental in his development and after completing a CRB form he began helping out on activities. With Mentor Allan support he went on many courses: Off Road Cycling Leader course, Nordic Walking Leader course, Cycle maintenance courses, Health Walk Leader Course and First Aid courses. After completing these courses, he felt confident to volunteer on the activities.

As a volunteer David took part in many activities including cycling on the Dunvant cycle path to the seafront, Nordic walking at Port Eynon, Hiking and Litter picking at Rhosilli, Swimming, Rock Climbing, took part in outdoor activities at the Rhosilli and Port Eynon Activity centres and guided tours of the Air Ambulance at Swansea Airport. All these activities were with carers.

After a year of volunteering with Mentor Allan, David was encouraged to apply for a post.

“After a year of voluntary work it was recommended by the Mentor Allan coordinator that I should apply for a Relief Sports Instructors job with Swansea City Council”.

David has achieved his goal to work in fitness and outdoor activities:

“I was successful and I’m now getting paid work with 5x60, Dragon Sports, Sports Disability and Mentor Allan.”

12: Haulwen, Swansea Carers Project

Haulwen, a carer, she found out about Mentor Allan Swansea in March 2009 at the Cardiac Support group that she attend with her partner.

“Although I was quite active before I joined Mentor Allan I soon became involved with different activities, I really enjoy the monthly Gower Days, I occasionally do Nordic Walking & I did attend one or two Pilates sessions”.

Haulwen was particularly interested in being able to ride a bike, and the fact that there were trikes available.

“Over the years I had made several miserable attempts to ride a bike so a mention of access to a three wheeler seemed too good to be true. Any way it worked for me so much so that I was soon the proud owner of a trike”.

She regularly attended the Wednesday Adventures where 6-10 group members met and either go for a walk or visit an art exhibition. The group have also visited the Egyptian Centre and they plan to meet an Archaeologist.

“I have really been enjoying myself but highlights for me were taking part in Sports Relief & Race For Life”.

Mentor Allan have supported her to attend courses, Haulwen has benefited from successfully completing a First Aid, a Walking Leader course, Nordic Walking Leaders Course and Basic & Advanced Bike Maintenance courses. As a volunteer, Haulwen has been elected Vice Chair of the Mentor Allan Operational Group.

“I have really enjoyed all the activities and making new friends with Mentor Allan and will be very sorry when it finishes”.

Since joining the project Haulwen has been an instrumental support. Haulwen takes control of the book keeping a record of people attended and the important part of collecting the money! She is also a committee member of the Operational Group and supports with weekly walking and Nordic walking sessions. Following the completion of a chair based exercise class Haulwen will soon be taking over the weekly class at Hazel Court on a voluntary basis.

13: Hilary, Swansea Carers Project

Hilary has been involved with Mentro Allan Swansea for three years. It has made a huge difference to her life and is now a committee member of Mentro Allan Operational Group. Hilary had been a carer for many years when....

“Four years ago I lost my partner of 26 years to Parkinson’s Disease. Having been his full-time carer for the last few of those years I was feeling pretty low. Just at this time my mother, aged 80, was diagnosed with bowel cancer so I became a carer again, I’m glad to say that my mother’s health has much improved”.

The weekly meetings are important to her...

“ the Wednesday Adventurers, go walking rain or shine armed with a packed lunch and sensible shoes, to forget our responsibilities for a few hours and recharge the batteries”.

She has enjoyed

“Being able to join in with the outdoor activities made possible through Mentro Allan, not only have I made some great new friends but I have tried lots of new things such as archery and cycling which has led me to buying a bike of my own. I can confirm there is truth in the old saying that you never forget how to ride a bike even after 35 years!”

She is proud of completing a bike maintenance course, walking leaders’ course and Nordic walking leaders and achieving...

“My record for cycling has been 18 miles on the cycle path from Sandy”

Hilary is optimistic about the future:

“In the future, as we really need to keep the group going, we are learning how to organise things ourselves. Sadly the funding and staff may soon be gone”.

14: Ida, Wrexham and Flintshire Disabilities Project

Ida has been a volunteer for over a year with Mentro Allan Wrexham and Flintshire at Etna Park in Buckley. Ida has been involved in making drinks at Etna park cafe for the all abilities cyclists, collecting money, helping people complete paperwork, befriending participants / building confidence, supporting people Nordic Walking.

Ida has mental health difficulties, she started to volunteer with a support worker from Next Steps but then when she wanted to continue she had to overcome difficulties with transport. However, this was soon resolved and now she travels independently on her own, by catching the bus to and from Etna Park.

Ida said she enjoys volunteering at Etna Park because:

“It is very relaxing and it is a relaxed place. I was made to feel welcome”

She has been trained internally by the coordinator and other more experienced volunteers and staff members on the project. Ida said that volunteering has benefited her because:

“If it is the right moment and right time it is very beneficial, it's put me back on the path and out of the four walls”.

Ida also wanted to say that:

“Mentro Allan have always made her feel very welcome and everyone is very understanding”.

15: Lisa, Ynys Mon Young Women's Project

Lisa is a young mother who volunteers with Mentro Allan in Ynys Mon. She attends as a support walk leader and is a key contact of the Mother and Toddler group. She first heard about Mentro Allan when the coordinator visited the group, and was keen to encourage the buggy walking. In the beginning there were only 4 members in the buggy walking group, but now there are twelve who regularly go for walks, and at Christmas there were twenty one mothers that took their toddlers to see Father Christmas at the Oriel in Llangefni. Lisa said

“I enjoy Mentro Allan activities because, I meet up with other mothers that wouldn't have happened otherwise and I learn about places in Anglesey that would not have got to know about otherwise”

She said

“although I've lived in Anglesey all my life, I have been to places for the first time on the buggy walk and have since gone to as a family”

Volunteering helps to take her outdoors, and it helps to direct her focus. She has got to know other mothers and is looking forward to take the walk leader training in March. She said that

“Mentro Allan has been an advantage to the Mother and Toddler group as it brings people together to socialize and to chat when they go for refreshments after the walk to a local café that opens especially for us”.

She is uncertain about the future of Mentro Allan, but after completing the Walk Leaders course shortly, would like to see the group continue as the buggy walks benefit her and the increasing numbers of other mothers.